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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : U. S. Mission Berlin

665
DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

March 20, 1959
DATE

REF : Berlin Telegram 721 to Bonn, 807 to Department

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| 5 For Dept. Use Only | ACTION | DEPT. |
| | REC'D | OTHER |
| | 3/30 | RM/R-2-PRC-8-240-1-240P-1-20-4-5/P-1 CIA-10-251A-10-0CB-1-055-4-Army-4- |

SUBJECT: Views on Berlin and the German Question Expressed by a Ranking Soviet Embassy Officer

Two Mission officers recently attended a dinner party in West Berlin which included Boris Mikhailov, the chief of the Political Section of the East Berlin Soviet Embassy. A summary of his comments were reported in the referenced telegram.

Although it is quite obvious that Mikhailov restricted his remarks, for the most part, to repeating the party line, he did not shy away from discussing the Berlin crisis at some length. A record of the Memorandum of Conversation, incorporating some biographic information on Mikhailov, is enclosed for the interest of the Department and addressee posts.

For the Assistant Chief of Mission:

Authority
By HR-m/sg, NARA, Date 8/21/91
SANITIZED COPY
SENSITIVE INFORMATION DELETED

Howard Trivers
Chief
Eastern Affairs Section

Enclosure:
As stated

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Subject: Discussion of Berlin Crisis

- Participants:
- (1) Boris Yakobevitch MIKHAILOV, First Secretary and Chief of Political Section, Soviet Embassy, East Berlin
 - (2) Mr. William Stevens, Editor of Minneapolis Star and Minneapolis Tribune
 - (3) Mr. Graham Hovey, European Correspondent of the Minneapolis Star and Minneapolis Tribune (with headquarters in London)
 - (4) (Host) Seymour (and Mrs.) Topping, Associated Press Correspondent
 - (5) David Binder, American free-lance correspondent and stringer for Chicago Daily News
 - (6) Professor (and Mrs.) John McCormick, lecturer on American Literature at Free University, West Berlin
 - (7) K. B. Jenkins, FSO, USBER/EAS
 - (8) D. W. Montenegro, FSO, USBER/EAS

on March 16,

At a dinner given by AP correspondent Topping/the above listed guests spent a long evening in discussion with the Soviet First Secretary, Mikhailov on the Berlin and German question, as well as U.S.-Soviet relations in general. Mikhailov had been invited together with V. Beburow, Press Attache of the Soviet Embassy in East Berlin, but Beburow begged off because of pressure of work. The host fully expected Mikhailov to give some excuse to avoid coming alone, and he and his guests were a little surprised when Mikhailov actually arrived, unaccompanied.

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STATE Throughout the evening several of the Americans present went out of their way to impress, individually, upon Mikhailov their concern that the USSR may be underestimating the determination of the U.S. to remain in Berlin with full maintenance of our present rights. Mr. Stevens, for instance, stated emphatically that the attitude of the American public should not be misconstrued. He referred to an article which appeared in that morning's Herald Tribune in which it was implied that there was little public interest and concern in the United States with regard to the Berlin problem. Stevens said that the public in the United States is very well

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informed through the press, radio, television, and other media, and that major changes in public opinion can develop very quickly, as happened when South Korea was attacked. Stevens encouraged Mikhailov to ask him some questions but Mikhailov declined to do so, observing that a question can often reveal more than an answer. Stevens continued to press Mikhailov to ask him some questions, and Mikhailov showed some signs of anger; this seems to have been the only time he lost his patience during the evening.

Speaking to the Mission officers, Mikhailov said that the New York Times and Herald Tribune are studied daily in the Soviet Embassy in East Berlin and that he and his colleagues are deeply disturbed by the recent bellicose statements of American generals and politicians. He stated, emphatically, "times are too dangerous for such remarks." In reply to a statement that the USSR has created the danger by attempting to unilaterally alter the 4-power status of Berlin, Mikhailov insisted that the increased tension is a result of misunderstanding of Soviet intentions. "Our objective is negotiation, not tension." He added with apparent conviction: "War is out of the question for both of us. We can have disagreements but they must and will be negotiated. The long-run trend of our relations will be toward increasing cooperation and trust. We have no other alternative due to the technological advances in weapons." Asked whether Khrushchev had not made some rather warlike statements recently, Mikhailov replied with a smile that Khrushchev may have sounded that way when he spoke at the Soviet Army Day ceremony, but that it should be remembered that he was then speaking as a general.

Mr. Stevens, in a subsequent conversation that evening, told Mikhailov that it appeared to him that one of the great dangers in the present situation was that history showed that the attitude of the Anglo-Saxon countries was often misconstrued in critical periods. This failure to estimate correctly the firm resolve of the Anglo-Saxon powers, and their willingness to risk war if necessary, it was pointed out, was probably a fundamental factor in the outbreak of both world wars, as well as the Korean conflict. Mikhailov said that, after all, the Korean conflict was successfully brought to an end. "But at what a price!", he was told.

Mr. Hovey then added that no one should underestimate this time the very firm determination of the United States with regard to its position in, and access to, Berlin. Mikhailov said in reply that others, too, were very determined.

Mikhailov was then told that, at least it could be hoped that the Soviet Union would not underestimate Allied resolve, but that it could

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hardly be believed that the Soviet Union would place the power of decision of peace or war in the hands of the people in Pankow. Mikhailov was visibly taken aback by this statement. He replied weakly that the East German regime had made no warlike statements, but was immediately reminded of bellicose statements made by Ulbricht, General Stoph, and others. He made no reply to this.

Mikhailov said that he was hopeful that a test of force could be avoided, and that it should be possible to arrive at a reasonable settlement through negotiation, even if the path of negotiation were not always a smooth one. One of the journalists said that, in this connection, a demonstration of good intentions by the Soviets in the Geneva talks might be a good augury of success. Mikhailov said that he thought a reduction in weapons and thinning out of forces in Germany would help preserve the peace.

Mikhailov then went on to say that the existing dangers made it all the more necessary for the two principal powers, the United States and the Soviet Union, to talk together and arrive at a far-reaching understanding.

During the conversation the question of prestige arose. An American remarked that it would be a tragedy if concern over something as outmoded as prestige should impede a peaceful solution to the present situation. Another remarked that, on the other hand, if loss of prestige was a matter of concern, it would be a major mistake for any power to involve its prestige too heavily in pushing demands for a change in the Berlin situation to the point of a showdown from which it would have to back down eventually. Mikhailov said that if anybody is to incur a severe loss of prestige in the present situation, it appears to him that it will be Adenauer.

Mikhailov was asked about the announced visit of the East German regime leaders to Moscow in May. He answered that it was "only a routine, return visit, like those made in the past." When asked, he said that he did not know the exact date they would be going or who would be in the delegation.

Regarding a separate peace treaty, Mikhailov said that the Soviet Union wanted a peace agreement with all of Germany. When pressed for a more explicit reply, he said that what he meant was a treaty signed by both parts of Germany, not a separate peace treaty with the GDR. At the mention of reunification, he affected surprise and said, "But who really wants reunification? Surely you Americans do not!" He was assured that the United States did want to give the Germans an opportunity to reunite their country. There was then a very brief exchange as to whether all-German elections or all-German talks should come first.

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At the end of the evening, when he found himself alone with the two Mission officers, Mikhailov said that he had only one question that he wanted to ask. "Do the Americans share Mayor Brandt's view that the Khrushchev proposal for "symbolic" security garrisons of the Four Powers in a "Free City" of West Berlin, in place of the occupation regime, is unacceptable?" One of the Mission officers asked whether this proposal, among such a flurry of ideas put out by Khrushchev, was earnestly intended. Mikhailov said that, "after all, it came from the head of the Soviet Government." The other Mission officer said that he was in no position to comment officially on the matter, but could only ask Mikhailov whether acceptance of such a proposal by the Western Allies would not be tantamount to giving up their present rights in West Berlin. Mikhailov did not reply. Upon departing, Mikhailov told his host that "there must be discussion; we will come to an understanding," and he added that they would be seeing each other this summer in Berlin.

Incidental Intelligence: Mikhailov said that Embassy personnel are taking over the houses of the military personnel in Karlshorst and will keep the school which his 13-year old twin sons attend. He added that Karlshorst was at a somewhat inconvenient distance, 14 kilometers, from the Embassy. He said that the military personnel were moving to Potsdam.

Re a West German press report that Khrushchev had been ill during the latter part of his trip in the Soviet Zone, Mikhailov stated, "He was tired, that's all."

Biographic Data: Mikhailov (who closely resembles Ernest Borgnine in the role of "Marty") said that he was born in Leningrad and raised there; was an officer in the Tank Corps, fought in the defense of Leningrad and was in Berlin in 1945. He said he visited China in the early 1950s; was head of the Tass Bureau in Vienna, supervising 70 employees, from 1950-1958. He said that he knew Ambassador Thompson in Vienna and played tennis with him. He remarked that he had a very high regard for the Ambassador. He said that he shifted from journalistic to diplomatic work when he came to Berlin in 1958.

Mikhailov, in sum, put on a very impressive performance. He remained at the party until well after 1 a.m., consumed a considerable amount of liquor (although not excessive), appeared equally at ease with both the ladies and men present, and gave a decided impression of sincerity and affability. His German is very good, although short of bilingual. He appears to understand some English, although he did not attempt to speak it. He spoke confidently and intelligently on a wide range of subjects and displayed a lively sense of humor. According to an Embassy officer who was formerly stationed in Vienna (Wm. Stearns), Mikhailov also circulated in the Western colony there but was renowned as unfriendly and intransigent.

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